

# The Athenian Mercury:

Tuesday, May 15. 1694.

Quest. 1. **I**'ve been marry'd for some Years, but liv'd very few happy days with my Husband, by reason of a Mother-in-law, who liv'd unquietly with hers, and has been parted from him several Years: She has used all the Arts she could think of to make my Husband entertain a bad Opinion of me, and believe that I wrong'd his Bed: She's now in a lower Condition than formerly, and reduc'd to much Want. I desire your Advice, whether I ought to go to her and relieve her, since our meeting is always Contentious and Unhappy? or whether I ought not rather to relieve her privately by an unknown Hand?

Ans. A rare Example, and which we wish might be often drawn into practice, not only frankly to forgive the deepest Injuries, but even to relieve those who offer'd them; so high a piece of Christian Charity and Humanity as certainly cannot lose its reward, and we heartily wish it may find it, in many happier days here, at least in a better World: But barring Raptures, as to the Merits of the Cause, and pinch of the Question, there's no Dispute but that's the better way of relieving the testy old Gentlewoman, which carries fewest Inconveniences with it, and that therefore 'tis better to do it by a Friend, as *Eates* now stand, than in proper Person; tho' we shou'd think it might not be improper to let her know some time after she has receiv'd the Benefit, from whose Hand it came, which, if any thing, will certainly melt her into a better Temper.

Quest. 2. *Whether a finite Creature is capable of enduring Infinite Loss?*

Ans. All Infinites must needs puzzle a finite Being, and perhaps there's nothing wherein Philosophers are more at a loss than in the Doctrine concerning those unhoopable Objects: However, we must say something about 'em, tho' understanding perhaps as much as those who are most Dogmatical on the Point, and that's just nothing at all. Indeed, to sink deep into the Metaphysical Notion of Infinite Loss, as the Querist expresses it, 'tis enough to turn the Brains of half a dozen Wiser Societies, even than our Enemies think we pretend to be. 'Tis a kind of a *Negative-Privative*, and if any body knows what to make of that, they are welcome. However, the meaning on't, if we can come at it, seems to be no more than the Loss of infinite Good, and if that be intended, it will not be to great a difficulty to form a pretty intelligible Notion of it; for 'tis so far from being a Contradiction to be depriv'd of this Good, that 'tis rather plain it can't be Communicated to us but by its own Inclinations, since it can't be commanded by any Fate or superior stronger Force, it being included in the very Notion on't, that it reaches all times and places, and commands all things; 'tis indeed actually infinite, whereas the Loss of it seems only adequate to succeeding Instants of Time or Degrees of Misery. On the other side, it may be said, the Loss of ill Men hereafter, when eternally separated from the Infinite Good, as Good to them, may be call'd in a Sense infinite, as considering the whole Extent thereof, and in respect of its Object and Duration; and the Extent of that Loss may also we think be properly infinite, there being no Degrees in pure Privation, and yet suffer'd by a finite Object; tho' we know not whether the Pain of Sense can be thus accounted infinite, because in Infinite there's no *maius* and *minus* which there will be in their Punishment, it being enough for those miserable Wretches who are condemn'd to it for now despising it, that he who inflicts it is infinite, and they must infinitely undergo it, without Mitigation and without End.

Quest. 3. *Having been employed by some Merchant in*

*this City to go Supercargo to the West Indies, I have carried several Servants over to those parts: Some I have had from Newgate, others have gone voluntary, now when we come in these parts we sell those Servants for four or five years time, according as their Indenture runs (if they have any) either for money or in Barter; now I desire your opinion whether it is allowable by the laws of God and man, for one Christian to sell another, in the way of trade, for we endeavour to get as much for them as for any goods we have: Pray Sirs let me have your opinion in your next, for according to your determination I intend to proceed or desist in that empty, for sometimes it is a trouble to me, and I have discourd several learned Men, but never receiv'd any satisfactory answer: Pray pardon this trouble, and answer my request, and you will infinitely oblige?*

Ans. If by the Laws of any Country, a Malefactor deserve Death, undoubtedly any punishment of this side of it is mercy. And no punishment more proper for Theft, which generally proceeds from Idleness, then hard working, which may also be wholesome to their Minds as well as Bodies, and produce a habit of Industry in 'em, so that they may in time become useful members of the Commonwealth, especially if they have good Instruction, and their Masters use 'em like men, not beasts, and don't forget they are Christians, tho' if they do, 'tis no fault of yours, who are rather merciful, in saving 'em from hanging, than a party in that Cruelty which they may afterwards accidentally suffer.

Quest. 4. *I desire your Opinion, Whether it be lawful in any Case whatsoever to imitate the Example of Abraham's Steward at the Well in his Journey, to find out a Wife for his Masters Son, I mean in relation to his Prayer, and asking a sign, and what's your opinion and advice to one that having an extraordinary affection for a certain person, being just going to visit her, and under great perplexity and disturbance of Mind, almost absolutely despairing to obtain his Desires, did on an accidental View of that place in Genesis, instantly put up his humble petition to God, that if the Person he was going to see were appointed for him, he would that day, for ease of his distressed mind, by such a sign assure him of it, which sign, to his great astonishment accordingly came to pass. Since this, which happen'd some years since, there being next to an absolute impossibility of his obtaining the Person he formerly desir'd, and some great Inconveniencies in his remaining still unmarried. Query, Whether it be his duty not to marry, or he be still at Liberty to dispose of himself otherwise, if he can do so to his liking. Your answer is desir'd as soon as may be, because he's under some trouble of mind about it?*

Ans. 'T has lain too long by us, tho' if it shou'd come too late for the Querist, it may be perhaps of use to some others. And our opinion is, That 'twas an unwarrantable Request, for God having given us clearer and better



better Reason, as well as the entire Revelation of his Will to direct us, we are not now to desire or expect such extraordinary Assistances and Notices as were usual in the *Patriarchal and Primitive Ages*: We deny not but God can give such unaccountable secret warnings as well as ever, and how superstitious soever we may be counted for it, are apt to believe he sometimes does so, by strange Dreams, Motions, &c. Whereby the Lives of Good men have bin preserv'd; but still we are of Opinion none can in reason expect it, nor with a good Fact desire it, any more than in another case, the *Pharisees* a sign from Heaven. It being sufficient that in all such Exigencies of Life we order our actions by the best Reason we have, with a just regard to the lets interest'd advice of our Friends, submitting all to God, and imploring his direction in an ordinary manner, and moderating our passions by the Rules of Religion and Reason, and entertaining no extravagant improbable Hopes disproportion'd to our Fortunes and Circumstances in the world. As for the Signs coming to pass it may be only accidental, however is not we think to be any ways depended on for the Regulation of the Quakers actions: But if there's no probability of attaining his desires, and a necessity of altering his Condition, with an Opportunity of doing it to his Advantage, he ought to embrace it, without any regard to those fancy'd Signs on which he can have no reasonable dependance.

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